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## Congress set to consider air cops, sealed cockpits

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Monday, September 24, 2001

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URL: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2001/09/24/MN24123.DTL>

**Washington** -- With the nation's airlines bolstered by a \$15 billion federal relief package, Congress will turn its attention this week to sweeping plans for upgrading security at airports and aboard planes.

Congress and President Bush have already provided \$3 billion to start enacting tougher security measures after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, which shook the public's confidence in the safety of flying on commercial airlines. But that is just a down payment on a much broader three-part plan that has widespread support in Congress and the Bush administration.

Legislation under negotiation now would place the federal government in charge of passenger security screenings, put armed air marshals aboard flights and require that cockpit doors be reinforced and sealed.

Facial recognition systems to scan airport terminals for suspected terrorists also have been recommended in a draft report by a special government committee appointed to revamp airport security, according to the Washington Post. The inventor of the system, Joseph Atick, president of Visionics Corp. of Jersey City, N.J., said it could be operating within a few weeks, according to the Post.

"We can provide the airlines with all the money they need, but people aren't going to climb on board again until they know they're secure, and our job is to see that security is provided, and we're going to do that," Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., said yesterday on NBC's "Meet the Press."

More ideas are being proposed. Rep. Mike Honda, D-San Jose, wants the House Transportation Committee to study the idea of removing the job of policing commercial airports from local law enforcement departments and making it a federal responsibility. And San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown has suggested that military jet fighters should be stationed at commercial airports so they could scramble to intercept hijacked jetliners.

During Friday's debate over the \$15 billion bailout package, which included \$5 billion in immediate relief and \$10 billion in long-term loan guarantees, several members of Congress said they want the new security measures to be part of the package. But in voting for the legislation, they said the airlines' financial plight made it essential to give them the cash infusion immediately.

Bush signed the relief measure on Saturday.

The \$3 billion already designated for airport security will come from the \$40 billion package for reconstruction and preparing for a war against terrorists that was enacted just days after the Sept. 11 attacks.

The Federal Aviation Administration estimates it would cost the federal government \$1.8 billion a year to assume responsibility for passenger and luggage screening at airports. FAA administrator Jane

Garvey told Congress last week that screening workers, many of whom are paid at or near the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour, should get more training and better pay and benefits.

In San Francisco, the screeners are covered by the city's living wage law and get paid more than \$9 an hour, plus benefits.

Armed federal agents have started flying on selected flights, but some in Congress, including Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., say that doesn't go far enough.

## **MARSHALS ON EVERY FLIGHT**

"I think there ought to be air marshals on every plane, not just random; on every single plane," she said late last week. "We've been warned. And I think that's the way to get back the confidence of the people."

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, suggested that a new FAA security division should be established, with responsibility for all airport screenings and air marshals. "I think there should be a career track so that we attract people that want to stay in this business," she said late last week.

Honda said turning airport policing into a federal function would be a way to make airport security a "seamless function."

"Every movement in the airport, all of it, has to be looked at," he said. "I'm prepared to make these investments now because these devastating losses we suffered this month were caused in part by a breakdown in the chain of command."

## **CHASING THE HIJACKERS**

As for Brown's idea about putting fighters at airports, the mayor said, "The public needs to know that military planes are available at a moment's notice" to chase hijacked planes. Brown mentioned his idea to Transportation Secretary Norm Mineta in a conference call with several other big city mayors last week, but he said the secretary was noncommittal.

If Congress goes ahead with a security bill, it will also have to address how to pay for it. There is talk of a new surcharge on airline tickets.

Whatever plan is devised, some in Congress have expressed frustration that better security has been discussed for years but little has been done.

"I think what the public wants to hear is that this time you're going to break the spiral of more tragedies, outrages, recommendations and then slow-motion implementation," Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., told Mineta at a hearing last week.

Mineta pledged further action, in addition to the steps already taken since Sept. 11. These have included an end to curbside baggage and passenger check-in and a ban on nonpassengers going past security checkpoints to gates.

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